DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 281 659 PS 016 528

AUTHOR Grossmann, Klaus E.
TITLE The Relevance of Attachment Theory in Different Cultures.
PUB DATE 24 Apr 87
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Symposium, "Quality of Attachment: Culture-Specific or Universal?" of the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Baltimore, MD, April 23-26, 1987).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attachment Behavior; Biological Influences; Cross Cultural Studies; *Cultural Context; *Early Experience; *Individual Development; *Research Problems; *Stranger Reactions

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on difficulties and possibilities of theory and research on emotional attachment in humans and problems associated with exclusive reliance on the Strange Situation procedure in cross cultural research. After specifying emotional consequences of qualitatively different attachment histories and appropriate ways of assessing their differential adaptiveness, discussion focuses on problematic dimensions of: (1) conceptual issues and biological issues present at birth that are relevant to attachment theory; (2) the Strange Situation as a proper method for assessing quality of attachment within and across cultures; and (3) long-range implications for individuals with different attachment histories in various cultures. In an attached diagram, an attempt is made to facilitate orientation to attachment research, and to indicate the still fuzzy boundaries of the domain. Concluding remarks concern cross-cultural validity, causes of possible failure to find long-range implications, and future possibilities of attachment research. (RH)

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The Relevance of Attachment Theory in Different Cultures

Society for Research in Child Development
Baltimore, Maryland

Invited Symposium: Quality of Attachment: Culture-Specific or Universal?

April 24, 1987, 10:30 - 12:20
Room B, Hyatt Hotel

Participants: Robert A. Hinde, Cambridge, England
Marinus H. van IJzendoorn, Leiden, The Netherlands
Mary Main, Berkeley, California, USA
Abraham Sagi, Haifa, Israel
Keiko Takahashi, Tokyo, Japan

Organizer: Klaus E. Grossmann, Regensburg, West-Germany

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The Relevance of Attachment Theory in Different Cultures

Attachment formation has been proposed to be a phylo-genetically programmed propensity in many social animals and man. In the tradition of René Spitz and Harry F. Harlow the foremost goal consisted of demonstrating infants' needs for distinct qualities of caretaking as a separate entity within a context of other needs. This has been established and widely acknowledged in the meantime. John Bowlby (1982) gave the concept of attachment a theoretical frame which is firmly rooted in evolutionary theory (Part II) as well as in systemic thinking as outlined in "a control systems approach to attachment behavior" (Chapter 13).

A most important part of attachment theory in light of the present move of attachment research to the level of (inner) representations is Bowlby's notion of "appraising and selecting: feeling and emotion" (Chapter 7). In essence, it contains the core of the *clinical* perspective of attachment theory: Under what attachment-related developmental conditions does a child develop behavior strategies which, in times of emotional conflict, are constructively directed at those aspects of reality which are the very "causes" of those conflicting emotions. Emotions as an appraisal system may direct the individual to those "real" (or objective)events that "caused" the emotional reaction in the "subject". However, in some individuals, the emotions themselves often may absorb some of those adaptive potentials and the individual is preoccupied with them.

If this happens, there are at least two consequences: 1) The emotions gain priority over reality and the individuals lose sight of or distort perception of reality ("neurosis"). 2) The emotions may "cause" the individual to "se-lect" only those aspects of reality that are emotionally tolerable. Other aspects of reality are either "neg-lected", or the perception of them is changed, sometimes dramatically, and often in contradiction to rational insights as in bereavement following separation and loss (Bowlby, 1973, 1980).

At present the most vividly persued research question is whether the behavioral strategies of individuals later in life

are systematically affected by different qualities of caretaking within more or less stable mother-infant (and to a certain extend father-infant) relationships earlier in life. Related questions are: If so (Stability), what are these differences (Continuity)? Are some behavioral strategies "better" than others (Adaptiveness)? Is this true for all, or some, or only a few situations in which the need to adapt may give rise to emotional distortions of reality with some adaptive disadvantages to the individuals involved (Ecological Validity)? What percentage of individuals would be affected under "normal" life conditions (Psychological Validity)?

It is proposed that differential adaptiveness of qualitatively different attachment histories can be assessed only as an interplay between ecological and psychological validity. Challenging situations with a high potential for emotional conflict may be quite different in various cultures. If everything one does wer prescribed by fixed culturally or religious norms, the need for individuals' adaptive decisions would be low, and different caretaking styles would perhaps be without noticeable consequences. We could think of cultures - or domains within cultures - in which the members' emotional disposition would not matter much for their proper functioning. Likewise, if one's reactions were prescribed by fixed or modal action patterns (Barlow), then any emotional appraisal system, if it existed, would not contribute much information to the individuals' adaptations (Bühler/Hetzer, 1929). Only when different qualities of experience lead to different individual behavior strategies with qualitatively different outcomes, attachment theory becomes a useful guideline for empirical research.

My notion is that highly demanding and emotionally involving individual adaptations may be qualitatively different in different cultures. Among other things, it may depend on the cultural or individual acceptance of a "natural" need for attachment with specific other people on the one hand, and on the frequency and magnitude of such demands on any culture's member.

Three Levels of Problems

From the contributions of the distinguished members of our invited round-table discussion I have gained the impression that there are three levels of problems that have to be dealt with:

Level 1: Conceptual and biological issues,

Level 2: The Strange Situation as a proper method of assessing quality of attachment, within and across cultures,

Level 3: Long-range implications for individuals in various cultures of different care-taking histories.

The three levels have been developmentally conceived. Level 1 is concerned with the phylogenetic, i.e. biological issues present at birth. R. A. Hinde has made an authoritative statement about this, as well as related conceptual and dialectic issues e.g. attachment as individual and/or dyadic concept. Hinde's notion of conditional stragtegies of different qualities of attachment has been widely cited, particularly his argument that nature had not intended idyllic partnerships but strategies, perhaps even evolutionary stable strategies of different behavior patterns within a given population. The question, then, concerns the evaluation of different qualities of attachment as differentially adaptive in different environments (ecologies) versus better (secure) or worse (insecure) for the individuals concerned (psychological validity).

Each level, of course, is full of theoretical and empirical problems. The three levels have to be discussed from two perspectives, an inductive one from observations, and, at the same time, a deductive one, from attachment theory. The inductive perspective asks: What is the most widely acceptable abstraction from the facts available? The deductive perspective asks: What can the inducted abstraction contribute towards understanding the "best fit under given circumstances" in terms of attachment-related adaptive behavior strategies involving the emotional appraisal system?

Without goal-corrected oscillation between induction and deduction from the set goal of attachment theory (called abduction by Pierce, as exemplified by William of Bakersville in loco of

Dupont or Sherlock Holmes in Eco's The Name of the Rose) the task cannot be solved (Grossmann, 1986, p. 53 ff.).

Of course, the 3 levels are interrelated. At the same time, I am taking great pain to de-emphasize the SS as if it were equivalent to attachment theory. It was - and still is - a most valuable research tool with a great potential for discovery as well as proof (Grossmann & Grossmann, 1984). At the same time, however one must not lose sight of the fact that it presents only a momentary glimpse into an ongoing relationship with a dynamic stability.

The main task of attachment research, after all, is to seek for differences in handling attachment-related demands by individuals with different attachment histories within and between cultures. This is not an easy task even within a single sample and certainly a highly demanding one for a given culture (how would that have to be defined?). It becomes a formidable enterprise to make matters comparable in terms of the "best fit" between individuals of known attachment histories and their ways of handling emotionally demanding attachment-related situations *across different cultures.*

The SS as a research tool would be too narrow for that. Reality per se would be much too wide to be handled usefully. Spitz and Harlow in their days still had to fight for acceptance of "motherlove" and "the nature of love" as an independent motivational systemic concept - among other motivational systems - of great psychological relevance. Today, attachment researchers and critics alike sometimes seem to forget that, of course, attachment is not the whole story. On the other hand, it is not at all on the same level as may other systems e.g. temperament, and, therefore any discussion around temperament <u>or</u> attachment would be incompatible with the theoretical aspirations. Difficult and easy children may become securely or insecurely attached, but without attachment they would not develop properly as well adjusted human beings.

The following overview (Table 1) is an attempt to facilitate orientation in attachment research, and to indicate the still

fuzzy boundaries of attachment research. Since a definition is proper if we know exactly what we are talking about, I am using an injunction*) instead because we don't actually know the domains of validity. Attachment-related issues are where the injunction-wedge is wide. They are methodologically open, research concentrates on discovery and validity. The narry view is methodologically closed and concentrates on typology and stability (reliability).

Level 1: Biological and Conceptual Issues

On level 1 we may look at different qualities of attachment as if they were naturally selected conditional strategies, in contrast to the selection of maternal stereotyping. Hinde (1982, p. 71) has created some misunderstanding among attachment researchers. It is only fair to repeat that Hinde's critical evaluation of attachment theory and research dealt only with the biological aspects of adaptation (p. 68). However, there are implications of hierarchical: some strategies are better than others - versus equivalent options: for all selected strategies there is a best fit with specific realities. In the one case a secure attachment pattern would be "what nature had intended", in the other case it could be more adaptive to be calm upon separation in Bielefeld (with many A patterns), or to become unconsolable in Israel or Japan (with many C patterns).

For Mary Main (1981) the conditional strategies of ABC are not equivalent options, but insecure attachment patterns are only a "second best" choice with high psychological costs. This is in line with attachment theory where ontogenetic adaptive advantages are clearly attributed to the secure "B" attachment related organizational constructs (Sroufe & Waters, 1977).

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*) Injunction: a "more or less" instead of de-finit-ion.

Level 2: The Strange Situation as a Proper Method for Assessing Quality of Attachment, Within and Across Cultures

On the basis of a "meta"-analysis M. H. v. IJzendoorn has identified samples for which the strange situation data deviate most clearly from the origin in a correspondance analysis: The Japanese sample in the C1/B3 direction, the Israeli Kibbutz sample in the C1 direction and the North German (Bielefeld) in the A-direction.

The assumed culture-specific implications are closely connected with the status of the SS in different cultures. Both, Keiko Takahashi from Japan, and Abraham Sagi from Israel, emphasize that the SS is too stressful a procedure in their cultures to provide cross-culturally comparable results. Takahashi has shown that the proportion of anxiously-ambivalent classifications decreased as separation stress eased with increasing familiarity of the situation. Takahashi's notions about the specific Japanese child rearing conditions and later attachment-related demands on individuals in that society will perhaps clarify the issue.

Sagi has similar ideas. In fact, his criticisms like those of Lamb et al. (1984) are aimed at the validity of the SS as a research instrument per se: if it does not create similar psychological experience for all infants, then to him it does not appear to be a valid instrument. The criticisms of the SS may or may not be justified. However, the data provide a basis for subsequent investigations. Even if the SS would be "unfair" to the infants reared in Kibbutzim, there may still be a good chance to employ "the wider view of attachment theory" (Grossmann, Grossmann, Schwan, 1986, 124 - 133) for further culture-relevant insights. What would be the culture-oriented prospectus for continuation of the impressive research data in Israel?

Grossmann has tested the validity of the SS by replicating the most persuasive correlations between maternal sensitivity in the first year and SS classification. Furthermore, cross-situational data show that SS classification was highly related to the infant's empathy with an adult clown, and, also to different

interaction styles in an open play situation, one week prior to the SS. His definition of "meaning" of various attachment patterns is based on different forms of open/closed qualities of expressive communications and their different consequences. An example of a conceptual strategy of communication analysis may reveal an aspect of an underlying organizational structure (Grossmann, 1985, Fig. 1, 311; Grossmann, 1987).

Van IJzendoorn's "meta-analysis" of the SS was based on 1848 classifications. The question to be asked in this context, is, whether anything worthwhile can be learned from comparing different distributions of SS classifications, given the unsolved methodological difficulties outlined by van IJzendoorn, by Sagi, as well as by Lamb et al. (1984).

Level 3: Long-Range Implications for Individuals with Different Attachment Histories in Various Cultures

The SS as a centerpoint of attachment research (Tab. 1) has developed mainly, because of its availability and comparability. The meaning of SS data has to be assessed longitudinally from circumstances at birth, through analysis of social interactions, and from organizational structure later in life. It is proposed that the validity of the attachment concept can only be shown by assessing the organizational structure of the individuals involved in a variety of situations across the life span (Ainsworth, 1985). Some of the situations may be dyadic, which adds to the already existing data on the stability of attachment classification under stable life conditions (Main, 1981; Main, Kaplan & Cassidy, 1985; Sroufe & Waters, 1977; Wartner, 1987). Some situations pertain to the individuals in the absence of the attachment figure, as in Kindergarten or preschool (Erickson, Sroufe & Egeland, 1985; Suess, 1987) or even in drawing a family picture at 6 years of age (Main, personal communication). Some are closely related to the mothers' childhood memories as in Main's adult attachment interview (Main et al.; Fremmer-Bombik, 1987; Grossmann, Fremmer-Bombik, Rudolph, Grossmann, 1987).

The third level, as already discussed, concerns the long-range

implications for individuals with different care-taking histories in various cultures. My own notion is that the functioning of individuals in attachment relevant situations has to be assessed on the basis of, as well as in addition to, traditional variable research. Bowlby's internal working model has an enormous heuristical potential. We have to find out

1) how it can be assessed,
2) in what situations and life circumstances it may become relevant, and for whom,
3) how much it matters for the individuals' adaptation to critical situations and in emotionally involving encounters with relevant others,
4) whether attachment-relevant experiences can be compensated for by advantages in other domains such as physiological conditions, health, cultural traditions, special skills, intellectual competence, etc., and
5) how the representation of attachment related experiences can be conceptualized in such a way as to be theoretically, methodologically and empirically useful.

On the basis of existing research strategies it may be stated that the meaning of different distributions of attachment classifications on the basis of the SS alone may be cross-culturally irrelevant if, because of various culture-specific meanings, it measures different things. This cannot be decided on SS data alone.

Consequences

The validity with each culture has to be conceptually derived. A variety of conceptually derived measures is already available (Main, Sroufe, Grossmann, Waters & Deane, 1985). In addition, the relevance of differences in quality of attachment within each culture can be assessed only by studying implications, first on the variable level by correlations, but, in addition, also on the individual level by predicting corresponding attachment relevant behavior strategies.

Finally, it could very well be true that any failure to find

long-range implications may be due to methodological failure, or to the absence of cultural challenges, or to the presence of cultural norms which prevent the arousal of the representations of attachment experiences in children, adolescents and adults by overriding behavior norms. Data from Kobak & Main in the US, and our own data seem to indicate that attachment-related differences can nonetheless be definitely shown. The question as already stated, is: Does it matter, and to whom, and under what circumstances?

As these questions, guided by attachment theory, are being investigated for various samples in different cultures, the culture-specific life challenges may become more obvious than they are now in cross-cultural research. In addition, the universality of secure and insecure attachment representations may also become more obvious through the sheer similarities in adaptational strategies shown by various individuals across cultures once their representations have been aroused by attachment-relevant adaptive challenges. On the basis of available data from older children as well as from their mothers the following can be said: They appear to be unable to integrate contradicting emotions of (ambivalent) relationships in a coherent manner.

Discussion Questions

1. Biological and Conceptual Issues: Are Conditional Attachment Behavior Strategies Equivalent?

2. Is the Strange Situation The Proper Method for Assessing Quality of Attachment Within and Across Different Cultures?

3. Are Long-Range Implications for Individuals with Different Attachment Histories the Appropriate Test for Cross-Cultural Validity of Attachment?

Table 1: An outline of the domain of the wider view of attachment research (diamond-shaped figure) and the narrow view of attachment research (circle) in a developmental context of various individual differences that may be of culture-specific importance. See text.

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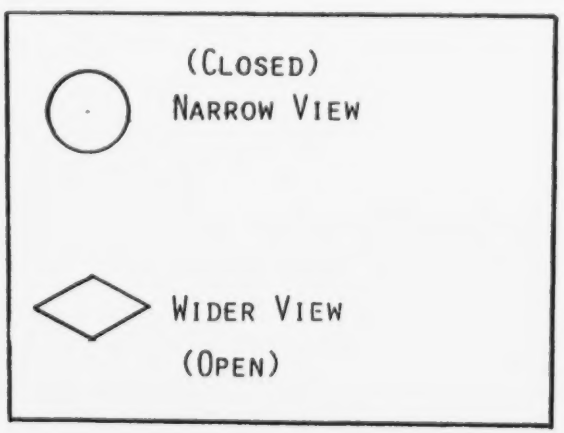
Conditions and Prerequisites, Expectancies at Birth	Physiol. Condit. (APGAR, NBAS, Temperament, Premat. Birth, Boy, Girl	Health, Food, Poison (DDT, Lead, Protein, Vitamin, Drugs...)	Emot. Needs, Biolog. Programs, Signal systems, Evaluat. Systems	Cultural Traditions: History, Values, norms, Demands, "Challenges"	Competence, Skills, Knowledge, Achievement, Mastery, Information Process.
Interactions, Context, Arousal of Attachment	Ease of Interaction, specific to above Criteria	Caretaking Quality, Bodily Condtitions, Immunology,	Sensitivity of Caretakers, Emot. Availability, Communication Style...	Familiy, Social, Economic, Ecolog. Condit.,	Time and Kind of Intellectual Experiences, Opportunities, Encouragement,

Validity of Attachment: SS "Injunctive"

Attachment Structure: "Meaning" (Dyadic)

Empathy Play Quality of Experience

Emotional Flexibility Task - Related



Organizational Structure: Representational Model (Individ.)

Organization of Emotions, Frustration, Conflict, Dyadic vs. Individualistic (Inner Working Model) Interpersonal Perspectives Emotion. & Soc. constructive Behavior

Organization of Goal-Hierarchies (Values)

Organization of Planing and Acting, Intellect. Constructive Behavior

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